



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
Office of Communications**



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Los Angeles County Records First Local Case of 2002-03 Flu Virus

Public health officials say a flu shot is the best protection available

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services is confirming the county's first reported cases of influenza A for the 2002-03 flu season. Influenza type A was isolated from an infant in the South Bay area on December 3. In addition there have been increasing reports from private medical doctors about respiratory illness compatible with influenza disease. Another respiratory virus called respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) has also been detected in extremely large numbers across the county; RSV infection occurs in infants and small children and can be indistinguishable from influenza.

"This is later than usual for the start time of flu season," said Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H., County Health Officer and Director of Public Health. "By this time in past years, there were one or two dozen cases detected in Los Angeles County. However, we cannot predict whether this flu season will be light or heavy, so getting immunized remains the best protection."

This year's vaccine is designed to protect the public from the influenza strains isolated last year around the world. In much of the U.S. last year, a late season strain of influenza B caused outbreaks among school children; that strain was added to this year's vaccine. Flu shots are the most effective way to prevent getting the illness and there is still enough time to get immunized. It generally takes 10 – 14 days before the vaccine becomes fully effective.

Flu vaccine is still widely available at many doctor's offices and at clinics held at pharmacies and drug stores. Dr. Fielding recommends that patients contact their physician to receive the vaccination. If patients do not have a physician, contact the county health department's Health Info Line (1-800-427-8700) for information on low-cost medical clinics throughout the county. The final large-scale flu vaccination clinics take place this weekend, but vaccine will continue to be available at several public clinics.

There are prescription anti-viral drugs available for the treatment of influenza Type A if diagnosed early; these drugs can also provide protection to those who have been exposed to someone with the influenza Type A virus.

Take steps to avoid spreading the flu virus

There are also precautions patients with the flu can take to avoid transmitting the virus to others.

"Influenza is extremely contagious," said Laurene Mascola, M.D., M.P.H., Chief, Acute Communicable Disease Control Unit. "People with flu-like symptoms such as fever, muscle ache and fatigue should stay home during the first three days of their illness to avoid exposing others to the virus. It is important to drink plenty of fluids, eat lightly and use acetaminophen or ibuprofen as needed for pain and fever."

Aspirin and cold medications containing acetylsalicylic acid (major ingredient in aspirin) should never be taken for symptoms of possible influenza, since this increases the risk of a rare but potentially fatal liver disease called Reye syndrome, especially in children and young adults. Additional advice

includes the common-sense measure most of us heard from our parents: cover your mouth when you sneeze and wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 3,800 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$465 million.